
**HISTORIC PRESERVATION REVIEW BOARD
STAFF REPORT AND RECOMMENDATION**

Landmark/District:	Capitol Hill Historic District	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Agenda
Address:	1310 East Capitol Street, NE (rear)	<input type="checkbox"/> Consent
		<input type="checkbox"/> Concept
Meeting Date:	October 27, 2011	<input type="checkbox"/> Alteration
Case Number:	11-488	<input type="checkbox"/> New Construction
Staff Reviewer:	Amanda Molson	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Demolition
		<input type="checkbox"/> Subdivision

Building owner House of God seeks Board approval for a raze application to demolish the rear alley structure behind the church, located at 1310 East Capitol Street, NE in the Capitol Hill Historic District. The Board last considered this case at the conceptual level in May of 2010.

Property Description

The church operates in a former rowhouse that was constructed in 1908.¹ The 18' x 28' masonry stable structure was erected contemporaneously with the house, and it shows evidence of an original hay loft.² The current owner purchased the property in early 1979 and has used the stable in years past for parking and storage. During snow storms in the winter of 2010, the wood framing collapsed.

Proposal

In May of 2010, the Board reviewed a concept application to demolish the stable and replace the area with a parking pad. The church also considered a memorial garden in the rear yard and an accessibility ramp at the time, although no proposal for the latter was submitted or reviewed by the Board. In a vote of 8-0, the Board recommended denial of the concept of razing the stable as inconsistent with the purposes of the historic preservation law. At the hearing, the Board encouraged the owner to consult with community organizations about possible solutions that would restore the stable.

Despite the deteriorated state of the stable, no discernible repairs or stabilization efforts were made over the following year. On 4/26/11, the DC Department of Consumer and Regulatory Affairs (DCRA) issued a Notice of Violation and Notice to Abate (CEM1000033), which required the owner to, "Immediately render the site safe. Remove all dangerous building materials, stabilize all exterior walls and secure the property with

¹ The home's first owner was Margaret E. Murphy, whose husband, William, built the house. By the end of the 1950s, the home had been converted to a rooming house.

² The next-door property, 1312 East Capitol Street, includes an odd accessory structure abutting this one. Built perhaps as late as the 1980s and of a varied, used brick, it consists of a second-story enclosure supported on steel beams over a ground-level parking pad.

temporary safeguards prior to the completion of the repairs needed to abate the unsafe condition or demolish.”

On 5/9/11, the owners filed a raze permit application (R110082) to demolish the stable in its entirety. The HPO contacted the owners by email and by phone after receiving notice of the raze application, but did not receive a response at that time.

In September of 2011, the owners met with the HPO and filed the raze application for Board review. Concurrently, the HPO approved an application for a partial raze to remove only the yard-facing (south-facing) wall of the stable, which showed considerable masonry failure that could have posed a safety issue. The partial raze permit (D1100478) included a condition from the HPO that the remaining walls could be braced if needed. The owners had removed the rear wall by mid-September.

Evaluation

Demolition of this structure is contrary to the purposes of the preservation law, and specifically its intent “to retain and enhance those properties which contribute to the character of the historic district and to encourage their adaptation for current use.”

At the May 2010 hearing, the Board determined the stable retained its historic integrity, despite some loss of physical integrity by the failure of the framing. The Board has typically recommended denial raze applications for buildings brought to a state of dilapidation by lack of maintenance, both because such action would compromise historic integrity and because it would reward and encourage such neglect in general.

The Board has recommended denial of demolitions of stables, carriages houses, and contributing garages in many of the city’s historic districts. For example, it recommended against the replacement of a stable at 1822 4th Street, NW with a parking pad, despite the fact that the structure had lost considerable integrity as a result of demolition that had commenced without permit. In the context of the Bowen YMCA project (2201-2011 14th Street and 1300 block of W Street, NW), the Board determined a 1911 stable to be a contributing structure important to retain, despite partial collapse of the roof and second-floor framing. The Board required the reconstruction of a neglected frame carriage house at 3350 17th Street, NW as a condition of approval of an addition and alterations to the rest of the property. And in the proposed subdivision (consolidation) of three rowhouse lots at 461-465 Florida Avenue, NW, the Board stressed the need to repair the three associated stables that had been badly neglected and were also in a state of collapse.

As the Board considers the formal raze application at this time, the question is whether the facts of the case, specifically those that can be considered under the Board’s jurisdiction, have changed since the previous hearing. Absent any new information provided by the applicant, the Board could potentially consider whether the state of the building today evidences a loss of integrity that compromises the previous finding of “contributing” status.

The only discernible change in the property since May 2010 is the approved removal of the yard-facing (south-facing) wall. Despite the loss of fabric, this wall was not the definitive element of the building's character, nor would its reconstruction compromise the integrity of the structure. The stable unquestionably requires such extensive work as new floor and roof framing, replacement of doors and windows, and masonry repair. However, addressing these needs as one single project arguably affects its integrity no more than undertaking these maintenance projects piecemeal as needed.

Additionally, in the totality of evaluating significance, the surrounding context should be considered. The stable contributes substantially to the character of this alleyscape and relates to the historic, abutting rowhouse as a shared story of concurrent, early twentieth-century construction. The substitution of the stable with a parking pad or any other use that involves demolition of the stable not only irrevocably removes the remaining historic fabric, but also eliminates this structure from a parcel and an alley that are currently so defined by this building. Altering this relationship by replacing what is now solid with void would be a loss to the site, the alleyscape, and the Capitol Hill Historic District.

Recommendation

The staff recommends that the Board advise the Mayor's Agent as follows:

The proposed demolition is not consistent with the purposes of the preservation law because it would result in the loss of a property that contributes to the character of the Capitol Hill Historic District.